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Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln

by M. C. Rindlaub

IT was during his famous debate with Douglas that Lincoln forced Douglas to make declarations as to his position on the slavery question which rendered the disruption of the Democratic party inevitable, and robbed Douglas of the Democratic nomination for President in 1860. The specific question he forced Douglas to answer was: "Can the people of a United States territory, in any lawful way, against the wisdom of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the forming of a state constitution?" Douglas replied: "It matters not what way the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a territory under the Constitution, but the *people* have the lawful means to *introduce* it or *exclude* it as *they please* for the reason that slavery cannot exist a *day or an hour anywhere* unless it is supported by local *police regulations*. These police regulations can only be established by the *local legislature*, and if the people are opposed to slavery, they will elect representatives to that body who will, by *unfriendly legislation*, effectually prevent the introduction of it into their midst."

This answer of Douglas proved his own political death-warrant. It enabled Lincoln to say that "Judge Douglas claims that a thing may be lawfully driven from where it has a lawful right to be." While it won to Douglas in the Senatorial fight the votes of Democrats opposed to slavery, in other states "police regulation" and

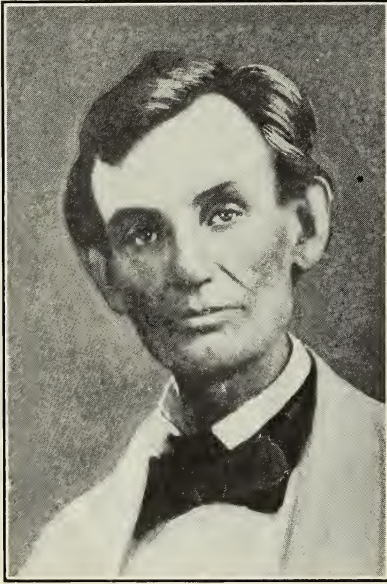
"unfriendly legislation" became catch phrases which were used to defeat him.

It was my good fortune to be present at a discussion between Lincoln and Douglas at Freeport, Illinois, in 1858. The railroad accommodations at that time were poor compared to those of the present, but the people gathered by thousands from all parts of the country within a radius of fifty miles.

Meetings were held in advance by each party at every hamlet and crossroads in order to awaken adherents to the importance of being present to encourage and support its champions. Great delegations were organized which rallied at convenient points, and men and women on horseback, and a few in wagons and carriages, formed processions, many of which were more than a mile in length. They usually started the night before, and, headed by bands of music with flags and banners, and with hats and handkerchiefs waving, proceeded to the place of meeting. As they marched the air was rent with cheers—in the Republican procession for "Honest old Abe," and in the Democratic for the "Little Giant." The sentiments painted in great letters on the banners carried in each of these processions left no one in doubt. On the banners of the Douglas processions were such sentiments as "Squatter sovereignty," "Popular sovereignty," "Let the people rule," "This is a white man's country," "No nigger equality," "Hurrah for the 'Little Giant'." On the other hand, the Republicans carried banners with such

mottoes as "Hurrah for Old Abe," "Lincoln, the railsplitter and giant killer," "No more slave territory," "All men are created equal," "Free Kansas," "No more compromise."

Each party had great wagons specially fitted up, drawn by four, eight, and sometimes twelve horses, bearing young ladies



LINCOLN AT TIME OF DEBATE WITH DOUGLAS

who represented the States of the Union. In the Republican procession one of the young ladies was usually dressed in mourning to represent bleeding Kansas. Over the young ladies, in one Douglas wagon, was displayed a banner bearing the sentiment, "Fathers, protect us from negro husbands."

The speakers' stand was a temporary affair, about six feet high, built of rough pine boards, and decorated with flags and bunting. Only a few seats were provided, but long before the time appointed for the speaking to commence a great crowd had assembled prepared to *stand* during the *three hours'* struggle.

Douglas arrived on the scene in a coach drawn by four gaily caparisoned horses, which had been placed at his disposal by his admirers. His coming was greeted by

a rousing welcome. Scarcely had the cheering occasioned by his appearance ceased when an old-fashioned Conestoga wagon, drawn by four horses, was driven up to the stand. On one of the seats sat Lincoln, accompanied by half a dozen farmers in their working clothes. The driver was seated on the rear near the horse, and guided the team with a single rein attached to the bridle of one of the lead horses. The burlesque on Douglas's coach was as complete as possible, and the effect was greeted by a good-natured roar.

Douglas spoke first and he was frequently interrupted by vociferous applause. At the close of his speech the cheering and hand clapping was prolonged and tumultuous. When Lincoln rose the crowd broke into cheers again for Douglas, keeping it up for several minutes, Lincoln, in the meanwhile waiting patiently. When at length the enthusiasm subsided, he extended his long right arm for silence. When he had partly gained this he said in an impressive tone, "What an orator Judge Douglas is!" This unexpected tribute to their friend aroused wild enthusiasm in the audience. When this applause had run its course Lincoln extended his hand again, this time obtaining silence more easily. "What a fine presence Judge Douglas has!" exclaimed the speaker earnestly. Again tumultuous applause followed the tribute. More and more easily the tall, gaunt lawyer won silence as he went on with admiring exclamations: "How well rounded his sentences are!" ending with "What a splendid man Judge Douglas is!" Then, when the audience had again become silent at his call, Lincoln leaned forward and said, "And now, my countrymen, how many of you can tell me one thing Judge Douglas said?" There was no reply and Lincoln proceeded to speak without interruption.

They had just come from Ottawa, where Douglas had propounded seven questions concerning Lincoln's views on the slavery question which he demanded that Lincoln should answer unequivocally. Lincoln read the questions and replied that he would answer them provided Douglas would agree to answer an equal number of questions, and turning to Douglas he said, "I now give Judge

Douglas the opportunity to say whether he will answer or not." Lincoln paused for a reply. It was a dramatic moment. Everything was hushed and the silence was breathless. But Douglas merely shook his head and smiled. "Judge Douglas remains silent," said Lincoln. "I now say that I will answer his interrogatives *whether he answers mine or not.*" The audience was quick to recognize Lincoln's courage and fairness and responded with deafening cheers.

The contrast between Lincoln and Douglas could hardly have been more marked. Lincoln was six feet four inches tall, and overtopped by several inches all who surrounded him. He was swarthy as an Indian, with wiry, jet black hair, which usually was in an unkempt condition. He wore no beard, and his face was almost grotesquely square—he called himself lantern-jawed. His eyes were bright, keen, and of a luminous gray color, though his eyebrows were black like his hair. His face usually had a careworn, haggard look, but his laugh was delightful, a high musical tenor—contagious. His figure was gaunt, slender and slightly bent. He was clad in a rusty black Prince Albert coat, with somewhat abbreviated sleeves. His black trousers, too, were so short that they gave an exaggerated size to

his feet. He wore a high "stovepipe" hat somewhat the worse for the wear. He carried a gray woolen shawl, a garment much worn by men in those days instead of an overcoat. He usually carried a faded green umbrella, with "A. Lincoln," in large letters, on the inside.

Douglas was of very small stature, and standing by the side of Lincoln, appeared almost like a dwarf. But he was square

shouldered and broad chested, with a massive head on a strong neck, the very embodiment of force, combativeness, and staying power. He was very well clothed in neatly fitting garments and shining linen, and while Lincoln traveled from place to place on the regular railroad train in the ordinary passenger car, Douglas traveled in great style in a special train, with cars elaborately decorated for the occasion, and accompanied by a secretary and servants, and a numerous escort of loud companions. On account of his superior intellectual ability he was called the "Little Giant." His manner was arrogant and at times insolent. When he first began speaking he invariably alluded to the Republicans as "Black Republicans." This was always resented by them with loud interruptions. Douglas



THE "WIGWAM"

The convention hall, at Chicago, 1860, in which Lincoln was nominated

would become angry and demand that the interruption should cease, saying that he had supposed he was addressing gentlemen. The crowd responded "We are gentlemen, and if you treat us as such you will not be interrupted." After he ceased using that approbrious epithet everything went on smoothly.

Lincoln's manner of speaking was plain and unimpassioned. He gesticulated very

little with his arms, but moved his body from one side to the other. Sometimes he would bend his knees so that they would almost touch the platform, and then he would shoot himself up to his full height, emphasizing his utterance in a very forcible manner.

I was also present in the capacity of a reporter at the Republican Convention, in

of undressed lumber, and was sufficiently large for the delegates and alternates, as well as for the accredited representatives of the Press. A gallery ran around three sides of the Wigwam, which afforded room for spectators.

One of the conspicuous characters of the convention was Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*. Being hostile to Seward, he was not elected a delegate from New York, but he managed to obtain a proxy from one of the Oregon delegates, and was therefore entitled to share in the proceedings as a member of that delegation. Everyone was anxious to see him, and the people in the galleries asked to have him pointed out.

My seat in the gallery was only a few feet from the platform occupied by Ellsworth's Zouaves, a military company in zouave uniform commanded by Colonel E. E. Ellsworth, who had brought his men to such a high standard of military precision that their reputation had extended throughout the United States. A half hour was given, shortly after the convention opened, for a display of their training. We can look back now and realize that this seems almost a prophecy of the part that company was to take in the preservation of the Union. When a year later Fort Sumter was fired upon, this company was

almost the first to respond to Lincoln's call for troops to defend the national capital, and Ellsworth himself was the first one to fall. His company was sent to Alexandria, near Washington, and seeing a rebel flag floating from the roof of a hotel, Ellsworth went up and tore it down. As he was descending, the proprietor, shot him. The assassin immediately fell from a bullet fired by one of the soldiers.



A CAMPAIGN CARTOON OF 1860

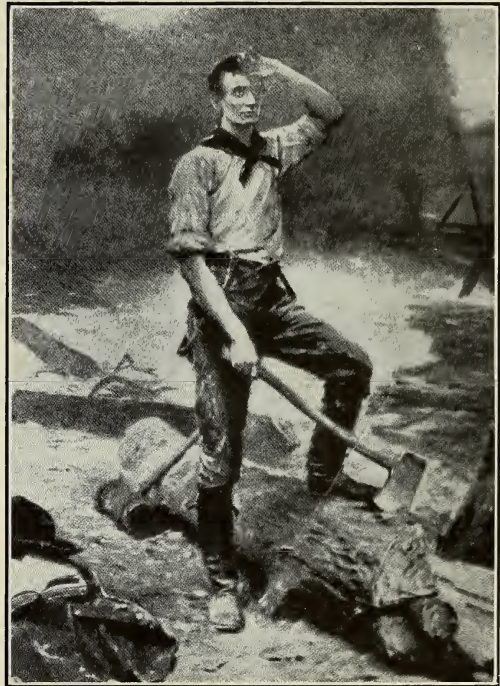
the Wigwam, in Chicago, when Lincoln was nominated for the Presidency the first time.

While it was believed that the city had ample room to accommodate the convention, it lacked an adequate auditorium. This was supplied by the citizens of Chicago. It was a rude, temporary structure intended only for the immediate purpose for which it was devoted. It was built

Shortly after the convention was called to order, John Hanks, a cousin of Abraham Lincoln, carried two weather-beaten fence rails which Lincoln had split, on to the platform, where they were received with tremendous enthusiasm, and Lincoln thereupon became the "rail-splitter" candidate, as the first Harrison had been the "log cabin" and Jackson the "hickory" candidate years before.

When the platform of principles was read it was noticed that while it repudiated the theories of the slave-holder as well as the Douglas "squatter sovereignty" doctrine, it still failed specifically to mention the great principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence as our political creed and as the moral basis of our institutions. Whereupon Joshua R. Giddings of Ohio, whom everybody knew as one of veteran champions of the anti-slavery cause, arose and expressed himself as painfully surprised that the platform did not contain a word of recognition of the Declaration of Independence, and he moved that a clause to that effect be inserted. No sooner had he stopped speaking than a tumult of voices burst forth with noisy clamor for an immediate adoption of the platform, and the amendment proposed was rejected by a boisterous vote. Mr. Giddings then took his hat and started towards the door, his great white head towering above the crowd. Before he could leave the place a young man in the New York delegation sprang from his seat, leaped into his chair, and asked to be heard. The impatient and noisy crowd undertook to interrupt him, but he stood firm, saying, "This is a convention of free speech, and I have the floor, and I will stand here until tomorrow morning unless you give me an opportunity to say what I am going to say." The impatient crowd seemed determined to cry him down, but he held his ground firmly, and they finally yielded to his courage. He then went on to urge the amendment suggested by Mr. Giddings, and after a few moments of eloquent appeal he renewed the motion in parliamentary form, and it was carried by an overwhelming shout of enthusiasm.

As Mr. Giddings slowly moved back to his seat there was universal inquiry as to who the young man was, and everyone was delighted to learn that it was George William Curtis, who for many years occupied the position of editor of *Harper's Weekly*, and of the Easy Chair in *Harper's Magazine*. Mr. Curtis's speech was as follows: "Gentlemen of the Convention, I beg you to consider well whether you are prepared to go before the people in this campaign which is just before us, in defense



From the "Footprints of Abraham Lincoln"

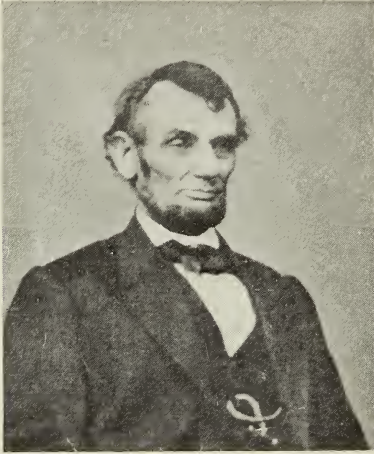
THE RAIL SPLITTER

of the charge that here in this convention, here where the free winds of heaven sweep over yon teeming prairies, here in the city of Chicago in the summer of 1860, you winced and quailed and shrank from giving your sanction to the words of the immortal declaration proclaimed to the world by our fathers in 1776!"

There was no oratory wasted in placing the candidates before the convention. "On behalf of the delegation from New York," said Mr. Evarts, "I nominate William H. Seward." "On behalf of the

Illinois delegation, I nominate Abraham Lincoln," said Mr. Judd.

When the convention first assembled it seemed quite evident that William H. Seward would be chosen. But the first ballot revealed the fact that Seward's chief competitor was the rail splitter from Illinois—Abraham Lincoln—the first vote standing 173 for Seward, 102½ for Lincoln; scattering 190½, and this surely presaged



LINCOLN, THE PRESIDENT

Lincoln's ultimate victory. The second ballot stood Seward, 184½; Lincoln, 181; scattering, 99½. The result was received with tremendous applause by the Lincoln supporters, while the Seward men looked on silently, many of them with blanched faces. The handwriting on the wall seemed perfectly plain except to those who would not see. The third ballot was begun amid breathless suspense. All over the Wigwam delegates were keeping their own tallies. Throughout the whole of that ballot the vast crowd was strangely quiet, except when there were changes to Lincoln. These changes were always followed by outbursts of applause, staccato, almost hysterical in quality. Long before the official tellers had footed up their tally sheets the audience knew that Lincoln was in the lead. Four hundred and sixty-five votes had been cast, of which Lincoln received 231½, and Seward 181. Two hundred and thirty-three votes were necessary for a choice, and Lincoln lacked

only a vote and a half. Then came the crucial moment; the silence was painful. Then a delegate from Ohio sprang upon a chair and announced a change of four Chase votes to the Lincoln column. "Lincoln!" shouted the teller waving his tally sheet, and at a signal a cannon on the roof of the Wigwam boomed the news to the waiting throng outside. Wild enthusiasm and blank astonishment commingled in the indescribable scene that followed. Delegation after delegation swung into line, and finally William M. Evarts, the leader of the New York delegation, moved that the nomination of Lincoln be made unanimous.

There was great disappointment among the New York delegates over the defeat of their candidate. For a quarter of a century Mr. Seward had been a conspicuous figure in public life, and his friends thought him the man of all others, at that critical period, to take the helm of government. On the other hand, Lincoln could hardly be said to hold any recognized rank as a factor in national affairs; true, he had won distinction in his debate with Douglas, and in his Cooper Institute address in the February preceding, but these were not accepted by the leaders at the seat of government as indication that Mr. Lincoln possessed the executive ability required to cope with the mighty problems of the period. This feeling became more general as the outlook became more and more alarming. And this feeling obsessed Mr. Seward to such a degree that four weeks after the inauguration he made the astounding proposition to Mr. Lincoln to relieve him of the duties and responsibilities of his office and assume them himself. Mr. Seward could not fail to realize his grave mistake when he read the President's dignified reply. In substance he said: "The people have called me to this office, and it is for me to assume its duties and responsibilities. I could not transfer them to another if I would. I shall always welcome the counsel of my advisors, but I cannot surrender the authority the people have entrusted to me."

It is interesting to compare Lincoln's letter of acceptance when he was nominated for the Presidency the first time, with those of Roosevelt, Taft or Bryan, when

they were nominated for the same office. While each of theirs occupied six or eight columns of the average newspaper, Lincoln's was contained in about twenty lines. It was so short that I will give it entire:

SPRINGFIELD, ILL., May 23, 1860.

Sir: I accept the nomination tendered to me by the convention over which you presided, and of which I am formally apprised in the letter of yourself and others, acting as a committee of the convention for that purpose. The declaration of principles and sentiments which accompanies that letter meets my approval, and it shall be my care not to violate nor disregard it in any part.

Imploring the assistance of divine Providence, and with due regard to the views and feelings of all who were represented in the Convention—to the rights of all the states and territories and people of the nation, to the inviolability of the Constitution, and the perpetual union and harmony and prosperity of all, I am most happy to co-operate for the practical success of the principles declared by the Convention.

Your obliged friend and fellow-citizen,
A. LINCOLN.

As soon as it became known that Lincoln was elected President, several of the southern states made preparation formally to separate themselves from the federal union, South Carolina taking the lead in the secession movement, so that by the time Lincoln was inaugurated seven states had done all in their power to dissolve their connection with the Union.

The next time that I saw Lincoln was in the summer of 1860, after he had been nominated for the Presidency. A great Republican mass meeting was held at Springfield—Lincoln's home. It was said to have been the largest political meeting ever held in this country.

It was held on the Fair Grounds, close to the city. The grounds occupied a tract of nearly one hundred acres, and half a

dozen stands were erected in different places for as many speakers. I took a position on a side hill where I could have a full view of one of the stands. While I waited there was a commotion in the vicinity of the stand, and then some men removed the roof from over the desk. A carriage drove up, and Lincoln was escorted forward. Being assisted, he mounted the desk where he stood, his tall form towering far above, his hands folded in front of him, and the multitude cheering to the echo. When quiet was restored, he told the audience that he had not come to make a speech, that he had simply come there to see the people and to give them an opportunity to see him. All he said did not occupy two minutes, after which he entered his carriage, and was driven to other portions of the ground.

Many have no doubt heard the story that when someone told President Lincoln that General Grant was in the habit of drinking whisky, the President quickly answered, "Tell me the brand, and I will send a barrel to each of the other generals."



Painted by Frank B. Carpenter

LINCOLN AND HIS CABINET

"The first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation"

The period of the story was given as the time when Grant was winning victories at Belmont, Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. As a matter of fact, the whole story is a fabrication. It is part of a story of an imaginary banquet written by Miles O'Reilly in 1862. The story took so well

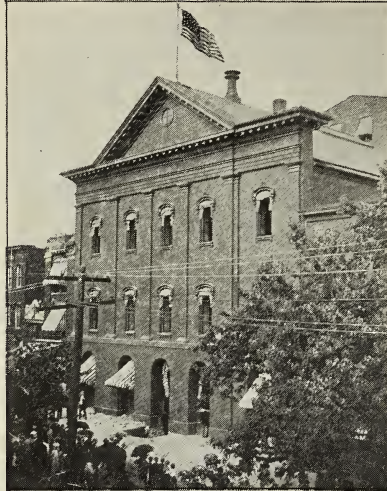
that it was repeated all over the country until soon people began to believe it genuine, and there are, no doubt, thousands of people today who consider it authentic. Only a short time ago I saw the story given as a fact by *Harper's Weekly*.

The fact is that Lincoln always was a believer in total abstinence. As early as February, 1842, he had delivered several strong temperance addresses, and when the committee appointed by the Chicago convention notified him of his nomination, he responded, in part, as follows: "Gentlemen, we must pledge our mutual health in the most healthy beverage which God has given to man. It is the only beverage I have ever used, or allowed in my family, and I cannot conscientiously depart from it on this occasion. It is pure Adam's ale from the spring." Lincoln frequently voiced his dislike for liquor, and once said, "The next question after reconstruction will be the overthrow of the liquor traffic."

Lincoln was the first President to fall by the assassin's hand. There were no telephones then, and many of the inland towns had no telegraph. But the terrible news spread with wonderful rapidity. Factories shut down; offices were closed; business houses of nearly every character closed their doors; and bells were tolled, adding to the depression and consternation of the people. The great loyal North had hardly ceased from its rejoicing over the capture of Richmond; the capitulation of Petersburg, and the surrender of Lee's army, which meant the ending of the war.

Every city and village had been dressed in gay colors. Flags were flying, men were rejoicing, meetings were being held, patriotic speeches were being listened to, sermons were preached, songs were sung and praises spoken. But almost before the rejoicing was over came this terrible cloud, with its horrors and gloom, black and for-

bidding; this crushing blow; this overwhelming grief—the death of the man whose conduct in the four years of war had been even wiser than the people had dared to hope for, and upon whom had centered the affections of a grateful and a loyal nation. But the bright colors disappeared; the happy hearts gave place to aching ones; the nation was stunned; millions were as much mourners as if they stood at the open graves of their dear ones. The column rules of every newspaper in the North and some in the South were



FORD'S THEATRE

While seated in his private box in this theatre, Abraham Lincoln was shot by J. Wilkes Booth

turned, making each paper a reminder of the great calamity and sorrow; and whole pages were devoted to descriptions of the awful tragedy and references to the President's great deeds.

Each passing year serves to emphasize the fact that the memory of Abraham Lincoln has been more potent than any other influence in bringing the people of the North and the South into more harmonious relations toward each other.

In the language of another:

Heroic soul, in homely garb half hid,
Sincere, sagacious, melancholy, quaint,
What he endured, no less than what he did,
Has reared his monument and crowned
him saint.